NEWS RELEASE

Back to School Internet Tips for Kids (and Parents)

SACRAMENTO–In this electronic age, and especially since the inception of the burgeoning Internet, a new generation of students literally has a world of information instantly available at their fingertips. Kids in California can compare notes with "kinder" counterparts in Germany and cyber-amigos in South America. They can relive historical events, rocket through the solar system and outer space, and view the world's art masterpieces, all at the click of a mouse.

During the next few weeks, kids will be returning to schools where there's a computer in every classroom, and in most households as well. They're using these computers to do research and learn new skills, and they're spending an increasing amount of time online. But, as is the case with most amazing new technologies, the benefits are not without risks.

"Students using the Internet to do research may inadvertently come across information that's not appropriate for them, or may unwittingly come into contact with unsavory characters in chatrooms or other interactive sites. And, with more and more opportunities to purchase goods and services online, cyber-shoppers need to take precautions to protect their personal and credit information and to ensure that they're dealing with reputable businesses," said Kathleen Hamilton, Director of the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA).

DCA has developed some tips for kids (and their parents) to ensure that time spent online is both productive and safe.

Golden Rule #1: Whether you're at the beach or on the Internet, be careful when you surf!
Parents should caution their kids to be wary about providing **any** personal information online. If someone on the Internet asks them for their address, phone number, e-mail address, or school name, kids should be instructed to tell their parents or another trusted adult immediately, before posting **any** personal information.

Golden Rule #2: Use the "back" button on your keyboard to "back away" from information that's not for kids. Parents should **always** monitor where their kids are going in cyber-space, but it's also a good idea to teach children how to make a quick getaway if they come across information that they're not comfortable with. Parents may also want to consider using their Internet provider's user settings to limit information kids can access, or installing blocking software that screens sites and prevents kids from accessing adult-oriented sites.

Golden Rule #3: Don't put anything in your electronic shopping cart until an adult checks it out!
Internet shopping is quick, easy and convenient – if you make sure that you're dealing with legitimate businesses. Parents should instruct their kids to answer these questions before making online purchases: Did you get permission first? Do you know about the company you're buying from? Have you bought anything there before, or do you know someone else who has? Have you saved enough money to pay the bill when it comes? Some additional tips for adults:

√   Don't do business with companies you don't know. Investigate the company before you order anything. Double check the company's telephone number with directory assistance, or have a store catalog or brochure mailed to you. You can also check the business' reputation with the Better Business Bureau, the company's state attorney general, or the National Fraud Information Center at **www.fraud.org** or (800) 876-7060.

√ Find out where the company is physically located. Resolving problems with businesses in other countries – or other states – can be complicated.

√ Don't give out your bank account number, credit card number, or other personal information unless you've verified that the company is legitimate.

√ Pay for your purchases by credit or charge card. That way, your transaction may be protected under the Fair Credit Billing Act, which gives you the right to dispute charges under certain circumstances and to temporarily withhold payment while the creditor investigates them. Some credit cards also offer additional warranty or purchase protection benefits.

√ Start with a small, inexpensive order to see how the company handles your order.

√ Find out about the company's return policy.

√ Before providing any sensitive personal information, make sure that you are using a secure browser.

The Internet is an international marketplace of ideas and information, and if kids and their parents do a little homework, it can also be a safe and convenient way to learn and shop.

# # #